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The Sacramental Theology of Archbishop Mar Ivanios

The Syriac Churches have not developed a theology of the sacraments (mysteries-*raze'*) of the Church, as the Latin Church has done. But this does not mean that they have not reflected on them. "Reflection on the Mysteries as celebration of the Economy of Salvation (*Mdabrânutâ'*) is always done in the concrete context of the respective liturgical celebration."¹ It is certainly meaningful to search for the sacramental theology of Archbishop Mar Ivanios (+1953), the greatest ecumenist in the 20th century in India. The following words were from his speech as a Deacon on the Sacraments of the Church:

"We should receive the spirit and body of Christ both spiritually and bodily into our spirit and body. There are ways that Christ himself has ordered and decided to receive him both spiritually and bodily, that is to say visibly and invisibly, into us. They are called mysteries or sacraments".² Another citation from another occasion: "This river that has flown from Christ's holy heart – the river that carries and flows – must flow into your soul. Therefore you must construct channels into your soul. These channels are the holy Sacraments (*qudashas*)".³

These words could be said to be the key of Mar Ivanios' perception and instruction of the sacraments (mysteries, *raze'*) of the Church. They show that the mysteries are the ways that Christ himself instituted for mankind for the God-man communion: in order to get united with Him in the Church, His *bride and mysterious body*. They also show that the truths about the mysteries must be spelt out for the spiritual uplift of the believers, and that the union with Christ through the mysteries in the Church shall lead the faithful to manifest their unity and of the whole mankind.

The first part of his perception of the mysteries is that which Mar Ivanios received from tradition – more particularly from the Syriac

tradition. It reached him chiefly through their celebration in the Church and the liturgical texts and their commentaries by ancient commentators. His awareness of the context of his Church and the urgent need of the community enlightened him to see the second part of his perception lying deep in the mysteries. In the original Syriac tradition, as articulated by Mar Aprem(+373) and carried forward by the Syriac Fathers, the mysteries are aimed at the holistic salvation of both the individual and the whole creation.⁴ Certainly Mar Ivanios' writings and instructions reflect close familiarity with the writings of the Syriac, Greek and Latin Fathers. He was also aware of the theological positions of mediaeval Western theologians, the Council of Trent and the main line post-Tridentine Western Catholic and Protestant theologians. But his basic perception of the mysteries, inherited from the Syriac tradition, had pitched its tent with him. He saw its glory. Crossing the dreading waves, he jumped into the wide ocean of his Church's perception of the mysteries, and encountering undercurrents delved deep into its depth, and collected the pearls, which could be rightly designated as his basic theological highlights of the mysteries.

Sources

Mar Ivanios has not written voluminous 'systematic' treatises on the general sacramental theology or on each of the mysteries. But his ideas could be collected from his writings and speeches. In 1991 I collected a list of thirty-eight titles of Mar Ivanios.⁵ Besides these, there are several letters which he wrote to different dignitaries, ecclesiastics, members of religious communities and friends. Many of these letters are theological discussions. His numerous exhortations to the Bethany Nuns, both before and after his visible and canonical communion with the Catholic Church, include short expositions of Christ, Church, Priesthood, Eucharist and Penance. They are valuable source for his sacramental theology. Mother Salga has collected the Sermons.⁶ In addition to these Sermons we have the following treatises from him on the Sacraments of the Church: (1) His speeches on the Sacraments as a Deacon. (2) His *Sabhâvatsaram – Oru Daivađâstra*

Višakalanam (The Liturgical Year – A Theological Analysis, 1926 (3) His short treatise *On Married Life* (*Vivâhajîvitam*, 1928) throws light on the theology and spirituality of the mystery of marriage. (4)The *Vçdôpadçšapâdhâvali* (*A Series of Catechetical Text Books*, 1943) published by him (5) The three volumes *Tûkkâsa* (*Rubrics of the Holy Services*, 1943) prepared and published by him.

Both his biographers and those who were lucky to hear him directly witness that he attracted numerous crowds eager to hear from him illustrious, erudite and enticing words on Gospel themes and the mysteries. He, in fact, was a master theologian (*Malpân*) of the mysteries. There are two periods, the pre-reunion and the post-reunion, in his career as a theologian of the mysteries. These writings expose the competent, mature and genuine oriental theologian he is. However, he was not a theologian in the sense that he used *logos* (*logoi* = words) orally or in writing prolifically to say more about *theos* (God) than to express his love from and towards Him, whereby he incited others to love God and others. It is remarked that in the Western ‘enlightened’ and ‘scientific’ understanding one could be a ‘theologian’ without actually knowing God in love. Mar Ivanios was, primarily and foremost, a theologian in the sense that he was a *theophilos and philatheos*, a friend and lover of God. This is what we read from what he has given through his life, orally or in writing. He was one who fell in passionate love with God and, on that account, with others, and wanted and challenged them to do the same. In those days compartmentalization of theological subjects was not the ideal oriental way. He had a clear perception of God, world, humanity, Christ, the Church and her mysteries. He was also fully skilled to present his perceptions and ideas very systematically, logically, attractively and effectively. On the mysteries of the Eucharist and the mystery of Penance he reflects at length and shares his reflections with the evident intention of inciting them to make the maximum profit from those divine ‘incarnations’ (mysteries) of Christ’s immense salvific love.

Presupposition

Anthropological Christology and Soteriology of the West Syriac tradition is presupposed for any discussion of the sacramental theology of that tradition. Man with visible body and invisible spirit (soul) represents the whole material and immaterial creatures. By man's fall not only his relation with God but also that of the whole universe with God was broken with the resultant mortality. Conversely reunion of the whole creation with God, for which "the whole creation has been groaning in travail" (Rom 8, 22), has to take place through man. But man in his fallen nature was unable to realize it by himself. That is why God the Word, the Only Begotten of God became man to rebind humanity with God, and thereby restore the whole universe in its relation with God. The incarnated Son of God, in whom divinity and humanity have existed in perfect unity, is God's unique way for humanity for reunion with Him. Christ's visible body is the way to his invisible divinity. After his glorification, the Church has grown as his body. The reunion and salvation that he has established is realized in the Church in the celebration of the mysteries. Those who co-operate with God by receiving the mysteries can be rebound to him. The reunion with God through Christ by the mysteries of the Church must necessarily lead to the full unity of the Churches that celebrate them.

There are certain main emphases of the sacramental theology of the West Syriac tradition: (1) The fallen nature of humanity necessitated Christ's incarnation to save humanity (salvation as re-union with God); (2) The representative status of man both in his relation to God and to the universe with regard to the disruption of its relation as well as its re-union with God; (3) The sacramental (sign-reality: symbol) nature of Christ's human body: Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man, as the reality of the fulfilled re-union of God and humanity, and as the way for the re-union of mankind with God (i.e., re-union through the body of Jesus Christ); (4) The sacramentality of the Church, the body of the glorified Christ; (5) Mysteries of the Church as the way correcting the mistake that took place in creation: mysteries of the Church are the ways for man to re-establish the unity

with God through Christ in the Church; (6) Procession of the mysteries from Christ's wounded side on the cross; (7) Relation between the individual's reception of the mysteries and the simultaneous celebration of the reception of the same mystery by the Church (e.g., marriage of a man and a woman in the Church is celebration of the marriage of Christ with the Church); (8) Insistence on the co-operation of the recipient ; (9) Ordained minister must necessarily officiate : because priesthood of the Church comes from Christ's priesthood, which in its turn is from the Old Testament; (10) Anthropology and Sacred Scripture as the two defining characters of sacramental thought : Scripture as source of theology and for explaining the symbols; (11) More emphasis on the eschatological aspect; (12) Holy Spirit acting through the Church as the principle of the mysteries; (13) Insistence on the visible and invisible aspects of the mysteries; (14) The mysteries as signs (symbols), but not as miracles; (15) Eucharist is the mystery of unity. - Most of these motifs are in the forefront and foundational in what Mar Ivanios has written or spoken on the mysteries of the Church.

First I present a general picture of Mar Ivanios' methods of teaching about the mysteries and secondly his perception of Jesus Christ and the Church as Mysteries and then the Sacraments (mysteries) of the Church.

I. A General View of Mar Ivanios' Method of Exposition

Mar Ivanios' sacramental perception is basically that of the Syriac tradition. The Syriac tradition in general perceives the mysteries of the Church as celebrations of *mdabarânuta'* of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, whereby the faithful participate in the same.⁷ The Pro-Oriente Syriac Consultation describes it as follows: "Sacraments are celebrations of the *mdabarânuta'* (God's economy of salvation) in Jesus Christ: God's plan in Jesus Christ to save humanity by offering his divine grace through those rites which the Church recognizes as holy *raze'*"⁸. The Syriac tradition views the mysteries as symbols: way and reality.

Mar Ivanios had a theological vision of the mysteries. May I start with a summary review of the method he has employed. He has followed different methods as is suitable that sometimes is multivalent and combined. Mar Ivanios spoke for long and wrote at considerable length on the mysteries. History witnesses that while sharing aloud his reflections on the mysteries before an untiring audience from his fiery tongue burning words flew logically and systematically. So also while reflecting on them silently before the Lord and with writing apparatus, hearty words zealously and unintermittently drove his hands to draw activating multicolor lines for many yet to draw. Oral communication on the depths of the mysteries was his favorite method. Already while a student to priesthood he preached on them on outdoor platforms and parish after parish of his Jacobite Church. On that account he was rightly known in his Church as the Deacon of mysteries(*qûdaša šemmâðan*). For hours could he keep crowds attentive to his sermons. He made use of every availed occasion to speak on the mysteries, particularly the Eucharist, as central to spiritual life.

Syriac Way with Passionate Love

As early as 1923 and later as well, he wrote and published books on some of the mysteries. His books on the mysteries of Eucharist and Penance and his discussions on Christ, the Church, Eucharist, Priesthood etc. in the course of his exhortations to the Bethany Nuns are ‘reflective.’ In this he is following the method of the early great Syriac writers. The Syriac way is not investigating or scrutinizing and explaining the divine mysteries by reason informed by faith or by faith informed by reason. Instead, it likes to gaze at them with wonder and awe and enter into it with the interior eye of the spirit illumined by the light of faith and read them with the help of the Sacred Scripture. Symbolic theology and typological exegesis of the Sacred Writings is its brand mark. A Syriac theologian ‘reflects’ with amazement on the given ‘sights’ and shares his ‘reflections’ with others. This way is especially protruding in Mar Ivanios’ meditative study of the Eucharist and in many of his exhortations to the Bethany

nuns. His book *Sabhavatsaram* is a gallery of the Syriac method of symbolic theology and typological exegesis of the Scripture. His written works on the Eucharist and Penance are not ‘scientific’ treatises. So are, quite naturally, most of the instructions to the nuns. He searches for the spiritual truth and growth. He uses intelligence to search the pearls in the ocean of the holy books on Jesus, making him available to the believers in the mysteries. In a few of the meditative exhortations to the Bethany nuns, in a very limited way he makes use of allegorical application of scriptural images. His typological exegesis of biblical images is an outcome of his perception of the divine economy of salvation and the history of salvation as well as the pedagogical role of the Sacred Scripture. That method enhances the synchronic vision of the economy of salvation. Mar Ivanios’ faith admiration at the divine love is an overarching mark of the works mentioned. His prime purpose is to incite his audience or readership to taste God’s infinite love and taste it to one’s full satisfaction with a grateful heart, and to co-operate with Christ’s Spirit to sanctify every cell of one’s being. He reflects and teaches on the mysteries out of his love of and for the Lord, for mankind, for the Church and for her mysteries.

Didactic

His didactic pedagogy is another remarkable feature of communication either orally or in writing. Mrs. Gibbons, his Irish biographer, quotes an interesting anecdote in connection with one of his early sermons, most of them centered on Gospel themes and the mysteries. I believe it suffices to reproduce it to illustrate his pedagogy in oral communication on the mysteries. ‘The small boy of this anecdote himself told the story shortly before his death. He had gone in good time and found standing-room near the platform. The crowd grew tense as the hour for the preacher’s coming approached. Punctual to the moment he arrives, makes the Sign of the Cross and begins: “Be not as the ox and the mule that have no understanding.” He then showed how rational man should have a goal in life and should strive manfully to reach it, from which point it was easy to lead his listeners to consider the Christian goal – salvation. He pointed out impressively

the duty that lay on each one so to direct his life in thought, word and deed that he might attain to heaven, that he might win salvation. The boy went home in thoughtful mood. Salvation? He must secure his soul's salvation..."⁹

Question-Answer Procedure

As a kind of didactic method Mar Ivanios liked the question-answer mode of procedure. He has employed it in some of his books. This is how he has composed the first three parts of *Vishudha Qurbâna oru Dhyânapadhanam (Holy Eucharist a Meditative Study)*. Question-answer mode seems to have been a favoured catechetical pedagogy of that period in his Church. Mar Ivanios extensively made use of this method, as is seen also in his exhortations to the Bethany nuns. This was also a favorite method in Syriac Church of Antioch. Such a method is seen also in the Indian Upanishadic literature, more particularly the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. This has to be seen also along with his commendable attempts for uniting Indian culture and Christianity as well as Christian religious life.

Western Methods and Terminology

In his illustration of Christ-Church-mysteries as the way of our sanctity and salvation, Mar Ivanios makes recourse also to the typically Western scholastic style of analytical divisions and distinctions and categories. We have a good example of the former in his illustration in one of his exhortations to the Bethany nuns on how Christ gives us holiness. First he poses the question: "How does Christ give us holiness?" Then he proceeds: the Church teaches that there are three ways for it. And this is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God (Eph 3,9). (1)... Christ is the perfect exemplary cause, (2) ... the meritorious cause, and (3) ... the efficient cause of our holiness and salvation.¹⁰ - In some of the exhortations to the nuns his expositions and illustrations are in typical Western Latin terminology.¹¹ He might have followed this method for the sake of clarifying and underscoring the prominence of Christ's role in our spiritual life.

The notion of ‘original sin’ as well as the division of sins as ‘original’ and ‘actual,’ introduced in the catechetical books **published** by him, are typically Western Latin, and not belonging to the Oriental Church’s understanding of man’s sin. The Syriac and its parallel Greek New Testament Rom 5, 12 or the Malankara Church’s *Order of the Mystery of Baptism* and her other liturgical texts do not contain the phrase or concept of ‘original sin’ and eventually later taught by the Trent Council. Certainly Mar Ivanios knew the teachings of the great early Oriental and Eastern Church fathers like Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Philoxenos of Mabbug, Cyril of Alexandria, Dionysius and Severus of Antioch about Adam’s sin and its consequence on his posterity. Some time in the middle of the year 1929 instructing the Bethany nuns on “Jesus Christ is truly Son of Man” Mar Ivanios is reported to have said as follows:

“Like each one of us he also has a soul and a body. God has directly created this soul. This body is taken from a woman. The Lord has the intellect to know and the will to choose and decide. The Lord has passions that are having the least disorderliness or weakness.- here the word ‘passion’ is used philosophically; not in the sense in ordinary parlance- In the ordinary language ‘passion’ means desire. The Lord’s passions are subject to reason. They move only according to the direction of his will power. The Lord’s human nature is like that of ours except for sin. The Lord has not known sin. Either the ignorance, the error, that is the source of sin or its consequences or sickness have not affected the Lord. The Lord does not have anything that is not befitting his dignity and divinity. ... But he liked to bear our weaknesses in his human life...”¹²

After his full communion with the Catholic Church, Mar Ivanios might have adjusted himself to Western explanation of the doctrine of original sin as a sign of his perfect obedience to the then prevalent official formulation of the Western Church. Further, in the early years of the Malankara Catholic Church since 1930, partly latinized Syro-Malabar priests, trained in Western theology in Latin seminaries, were the chief teachers in the Malankara Catholic Church.

As early as 1923, seven years before his entry into the Catholic communion, Mar Ivanios was cherishing and putting in writing the concepts of the “consecratory words” and the concomitant ‘consecratory moment’ of the Eucharistic liturgy. With regard to this the following statement is self evident: “The moment the priest says “this is my body,” “this is my blood” in the service of your holy sacrifice that is the holy *Qurbâna* (Eucharist), more speedily than the Sun rays pass through the eon, the heavens are open and the bread and wine become the body and blood having your true soul and divinity...”¹³ *Kûdâðavachanangal* (*Consecratory Words*) is one of his titles on the rubrics of administering the sacraments. The Syriac Church believes in the consecratory power of the words uttered by Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the concept of a few consecratory words forming a consecratory formula in the service of a mystery is alien to the Syriac tradition. It may be proper at this point to remember that the anaphoras of Peter, Xystus and Bar Salibi have only the accounts of the institution, but not the very ‘words of consecration.’ Consecration is the actual presence of the work of salvation and not only the consecration of the elements.¹⁴ That the early Church did not view the ‘words of institution’ (later taken as ‘consecratory words’) as reported in the synoptic Gospels essential for a true presentation of the Eucharist, is evident from the fourth Gospel, which is not less Eucharistic than the three others. What we have said about the concept of consecratory words is also true about the concept of the moment of consecration. The Syriac understanding is that the whole celebration of the mystery is a consecratory moment. The whole block of time is consecratory.¹⁵ A consecratory moment that is more consecratory than the others of a celebration of the mysteries of the Church has no place in the original Syriac understanding of the mysteries. The epiclesis or the so-called consecratory words are only peak expressions of the whole consecratory moment and process. Limiting the consecratory moment to a time of one particular prayer or ‘formula’ is typically Western, and foreign to the sacramental traditions of the Oriental Churches. Long before his full entry into the Catholic communion Mar Ivanios

was familiar with Western terminology of the sacramental theology. He adopted that phraseology that appeared in some way suitable to underline some particular aspect of his teaching on the mysteries. With the phrases quoted in this paragraph, he wanted to drive home and confirm the readership in the faith in the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the bread and wine of the mystery of the Eucharist. He was also familiar with different famous spiritual writers of the Western Catholic Church. He has ample quotations from their writings in his exhortations.

Liturgical Texts Unchanged

However, it must be noted that he kept all the Syriac liturgical texts of the Malankara Church in tact with regard to their theology. The oriental perception of the prominence of the role of the Holy Spirit with the Church and her mysteries is repeatedly reminded in his instructions and writings. While dealing with the Eucharist, he prudently and purposefully kept away from terms like ‘transubstantiation,’ *the word* of the Western Church to explain the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharistic bread and wine. We may say that he employed the Western Latin terminology to explain the Catholic Orthodox faith contained in the Syriac liturgical texts of his Malankara Church. So also he did not introduce any Western sacramental discipline, except the use of surplice for serving the Holy Communion to the sick and for hearing confession. In the liturgical celebrations he followed the Antiochene Syriac liturgical tradition.

Contextualized Sacramental theology

Helping people to decode the coded record of the Church’s faith and make it a text read for practice in context is the most important function and the most valuable contribution of a faithful and imaginative theologian of the Church. Exactly this is how Mar Ivanios theologized. He was not a non-evocative bookish theologian challenging none for anything. . The culminating motif of his speech on the Sacraments is growth and development that the union with

Jesus Christ through the reception of the mystery of the holy Eucharist and the other mysteries will bring to the members of the Church individually to the Church as a whole, and to the whole mankind at large. Revival of the community's sacramental life was the main objective of the preaching campaign of his missionary group. It was organized in the context of the spiritual deterioration of his Church on account of the factionalism within the Church. So the campaign had a specific intention of rejuvenating the overall spiritual life of the community. About the method of communication and the net result of the campaign Gibbons writes, "There was also a daily demonstration of the liturgy and a detailed explanation of the significance of its ritual, besides instructions on its doctrinal contents. Apathy fled, and faith and worship revived wherever the missionaries had passed."¹⁶ At that juncture his Church was just recovering from the confusions owing to the division of the *Reformed Jacobites* (later the Mar Thoma Church) in 1889 but only to head to the excommunication of the Malankara Metropolitan by the Antiochene Jacobite Patriarch Mar Abdallah. Mar Ivanios has given strong and clear expression to his firm faith and conviction that while on the one hand reception of Jesus Christ's Eucharistic body in the Church, his body, manifests and confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ, on the other hand reception of Jesus Christ's Eucharistic body in the Church, his body, should foster the unity of the Church to still greater extent, and thus to the full visible communion with the Catholic Church. He believed that the Eucharistic celebration is also that of the cosmic unity through Christ. In fact this is symbolized in the Malankara Church's Eucharistic celebration and it can be properly celebrated, Mar Ivanios believed, only in the full communion of Churches in the leadership of the successor of Peter and the Chief of the Patriarchs in the ancient Apostolic See of Rome. The unity that the Church enjoys with Christ through the celebration of the mysteries must serve the unity of the whole mankind with Christ and through Him with God.

Mar Ivanios theologized by practicing love of God and practiced love of God for theologizing. It may be more proper to say that he communicated the theology he practiced as a *philatheos* (2 Tim 3,4) and wanted to practice the same more ardently and closely. He theologized at length on monastic life in order to live it to the full. To realize it he preferred to keep away from the immediate context of the unchristian litigations and petit quarrels of the ecclesiastics and chose to settle down on the Bethany Hills in the remote forest area, an immediate helpmate context to strengthen his monastic life. He reflected at length on the Eucharist in order to celebrate and live it more fully. He noted down those reflections in order to help others to make better profit of the mystery of the celebration and participation in the Eucharist. He reflected long on the mystery of Penance and it helped him to grow more and more in God's love. He put those reflections in writing and it helped others to grow ever more in God's immense forgiving love while enjoying it in the forgiveness of sins served through the Church. He experienced and enjoyed union with Jesus Christ, the mystery of God-man reunion, in the mysteries of the Church, the mystery of Christ, which union he believed must be manifested in the visible communion of the Churches who serve those mysteries. He was under pains so that everybody else enjoys union with Jesus Christ in the mysteries.

II. Mar Ivanios' Perception of the Mysteries

Let us now proceed to a closer inspection of his general understanding of the mysteries, his general sacramental theology. Our discussion in the first part necessarily included summarily recalling his perception and his particular vision of the mysteries. In the present part of the search we try to elucidate his perception of the mysteries first through the terms he used to designate them in general and what he says of them in relation to the Church and Jesus Christ, and finally the mysteries of the Church in general.

Terms Used

Let us start with a preliminary note about the number of the mysteries of the Church. The writings and liturgical commentaries of the Syriac writers until Bar Ebraya (+ 1298) demonstrate that the Syriac tradition did not use the number 'seven' for the mysteries up to the 13th century. In the Syriac tradition there is no definition of the mysteries. However, centuries before Mar Ivanios, the Syriac Churches had accepted, definitely by the influence of the seven-fold system of Sacraments of the West, the symbolic figure of seven as the norm of the number of the mysteries of the Church. More particularly the 'Synod' of Udayamperur (Diamper) in 1599 imposed the seven-fold system of Sacraments of the Western Church on the whole ancient Church of the Thomas Christians in India. It gave the separated Thomas Christian group (the future Jacobite Syrian Church) an additional occasion to be subsequently confirmed in the seven-fold system as the norm of the number of the mysteries of the Church. In Mar Ivanios' Jacobite (Orthodox) Church also, the contents of the list of the seven mysteries was the same as the present one.

Already from his pre-reunion days Mar Ivanios employed three Malayalam words, namely *qûdâdâ*, *rahasyam*, and *mammam* as the corresponding words of the Syriac *raza'* (singular). *Raza'* can mean 'secret,' though in the New Testament it certainly means 'mystery'¹⁷ as we understand it when we use it for the seven mysteries. In the New Testament *raza'* does not mean 'secret' or 'hidden,' for which there is *thašyo'* or *kasyo'*. In two religious contexts, namely in biblical exegesis and in liturgy, *raza'* has a technical sense. In the former it corresponds more or less to 'type' or 'symbol.' Here 'symbol' is understood to have an ontological relation existing between it and the reality it symbolizes. The reality is present in the symbol. In liturgy originally the plural *raze'* was used by the Syriac Churches to describe the Eucharistic mysteries¹⁸. (It has remained so in the Malankara Church). Both in biblical exegesis and in liturgy *raza'* denotes a visible sign endowed with a "hidden power"(Mar Aprem). In the case of Sacred Scripture and the natural world, the "hidden power" of the

raze' serves as a vehicle for the manifestation of a divine reality. In the case of the Eucharistic mysteries the "hidden power" of the *raze'* (plural) serves as a means and vehicle for salvation. Later, possibly under the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite (5th c.), *raza'* was extended to other liturgical rites performed by ordained priesthood. Among the Indian Syriac Christians *raza'* could denote any of the seven mysteries. In connotations and the range of meaning *raza'* is very much close to the Greek *mysterion*. Therefore the term *mystery*, the English derivative from the *mysterion*, is more often used as the preferred translation of *raza'* also in Syriac Churches. Yet, *raza'* is more comprehensive than *mysterion*. According to Ad-Du-waihi, the term *raza'* "describes best the symbolical reality of God's acts celebrated by the Church in the power of the Triune God."¹⁹ *Qûdâða*, *rahasyam*, and *marmmam* corresponds also to *mysterion*. It appears that Mar Ivanios keeps some kind of subtle distinction between the three terms in their application.

Qûdâða is the Malayalam form of the Syriac *qûdâða'* and corresponds to Latin *sacramentum*. Literally, deriving from the root *qdš* (= to make holy, dedicate, consecrate), *qûdâða* means hallowing, sanctifying, dedication, consecration, etc. It means also the means of sanctification. In Christian usage it describes the service of sanctifying and consecration by ordained priest. As with *raza'* in Syriac, the word *qûdâða* is not limited to the seven sacraments. Even today in the ordinary parlance among the Malankarites it is used also to describe the 'sacramentals.' Mar Ivanios himself has said, "There are many *qûdâðas*. Generally they are said to be seven". But he does not consider all *qûdâðas* as mysteries like the seven mysteries of the Church. In the present work we consider Mar Ivanios' use of *qûdaša* with reference only to the seven mysteries. *Qûdâða* is the term he uses regularly with reference to the mysteries that are popularly known as the 'sacraments'- the seven mysteries. Sometimes he uses it only for the Eucharistic mysteries. But this usage is not Mar Ivanios' speciality. Whether for the seven mysteries or for the Eucharist, his preference is *rahasyam* (mystery) / *rahasyangal* (mysteries) to *qûdâða*.

Rahasyam

Rahasyam literally means ‘secret;’ and is the Malayalam word corresponding to the Syriac *raza*’ in the sense of ‘secret,’ and the proper Malayalam word corresponding to the Greek *mysterion*. Mar Ivanios uses *rahasyangal* (plural) for the seven mysteries of the Church, *rahasyam* (singular) for the mysteries of the Eucharist, and for the mystery of Jesus’ incarnation. In the Syriac tradition and in the traditional *qurbâna taksa* of the Malankara Church the plural *rahasyangal* (mysteries) is the normal expression for the Eucharist. Against this context the indiscriminate use of the singular *rahasyam* by Mar Ivanios for the mysteries of the Eucharist is unexpected. That here his attention is concentrated on the mystery aspect of the Eucharist is clear from the adjacent explanation he gives. He indicates also that the Eucharist is the ‘great *rahasyam*’ (*mahâ rahasyam*) and the ‘new *rahasyam*’ (*putiya rahasyam*).

Marmmam

The primary reference of this Malayalam term is physiological, and it means the most vital part of the body. Applied for concepts or ideas it means the key point, the central secret; and the inner or hidden meaning. The *Puthenkûr* section of the Thomas Christian Church, to which Mar Ivanios belonged, was accustomed to use the word *marmmam* corresponding to the *Pôîta* Pauline usage of *raza*’ and the Christian mysteries. The Malayalam translation of the Bible by the Protestant Bible Society confirmed it by translating the Pauline term *mysterion* by *marmmam* (e.g. *Eph.3,3,4*). Mar Ivanios uses *marmmam* in the sense of: i) the central secret (truth), as he says that the central truth of Christianity is not a principle but a person – Jesus Christ, and immediately he adds, “and this is the *marmmam* of Christianity”. Here he evidently means what elsewhere he has described as the “mystery of incarnation.” ii) In another place he employs *marmmam* for the Christian truth that by means of the holy *qûdâðakal* (sacraments) we live in Jesus Christ, who has ascended into the heaven; that man has a blessed life in Christ. iii) In most cases ‘*marmmam*’ corresponds to

the *Pðîta* Pauline usage of *raza'* corresponding to the Greek *mysterion*, namely the *marmmam* of Christ as the way of salvation for the whole humanity, and that Christ, the hope of glory, is in the Gentiles. In Pauline terms Mar Ivanios speaks of the *marmmam* of Christ. Thus *marmmam* describes Jesus Christ. iv) The *marmmam* of our life in Jesus Christ, who has ascended into life, by the *qudashakal* necessarily involves our membership in the Church, Christ's body that gives humanity the life of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Church is the mysterious (*marmmarûpamâya*) body of Christ while the Eucharist is the sacramental (*kûdâðaparamâya*) body. This distinction that Mar Ivanios makes is interestingly subtle, because the same Syriac word *raza'* underlies both these Malayalam adjectives. Thus he uses *marmmam* (mystery – *Pðîta* Pauline *raza'*) for the Church, Christ's body.

Mar Ivanios' uses three Malayalam words *qûdâðâ*, *rahasyam*, and *marmmam* corresponding to the Syriac *raza'*. *Raze'* in the plural form is the Syriac Churches' favorite original Syriac term for the mysteries of the Eucharist, and for the mysteries of the Church in general. Its singular *raza'* is the *Pðîta* Pauline term corresponding to the Greek *mysterion* and in liturgical language it can denote any of the mysteries of the Church. He knows that *qûdâðâ* could be indiscriminately used for the mysteries of the Church and the paraliturgical services (sacramentals). But he regularly uses it for the seven mysteries of the Church, and sometimes only for the Eucharist. *Rahasyam* is his preference for the seven mysteries of the Church and particularly for the mysteries of the Eucharist. He uses *marmmam* for different central truths of Christianity, and specifically for the mystery of Christ as the way of salvation for all, which *marmmam* includes also the Church and her mysteries. The underlying original Syriac term is the same for all the three words. The same original theological meaning of the Syriac Church's perception underlies all of them: namely the mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Church and the mysteries of the Church. Mar Ivanios has inherited and communicated it by the three terms, but with some sort of specification. While he uses *qûdâðâ* and *rahasyam* for the seven mysteries of the

Church and particularly for the Eucharist, *marmmam* is used for Jesus Christ, and the adjective *marmmarûpamâya* is used for the Church. He keeps some distinction between the same *raza'* – *mysterion* of Jesus Christ, of the Church, and of the seven mysteries, more particularly the Eucharist, of the Church. *Qûdâđa* and *rahasyam* (the mysteries of the Church) is *raza'* – *mysterion*, but not exactly as Jesus Christ and the Church are. Reserving *marmmam* for Jesus Christ, Mar Ivanios possibly implies His centrality. He is the source *raza'* – *mysterion*. Use of *marmmamaya*, the adjective of *marmmam*, for the Church seems to indicate that the Church is the adjectival *raza'* – *mysterion* of Jesus Christ the *raza'* – *mysterion*. As *raza'* – *mysterion*, the Church is the closest to Jesus Christ the *raza'* – *mysterion*. Jesus Christ *raza'* – *mysterion* is the Head and Church *raza'* – *mysterion* is his body. That is what Mar Ivanios means by designating the Church as the *marmmarûpamaya ðarîram* (mysterious body) of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ as the Mystery in Mar Ivanios' Perception and Communication

In the previous paragraph we have seen that Mar Ivanios communicates his traditional perception of the *raza'* – *mysterion* of Jesus Christ by *marmmam*, and that he does not use the term *qûdâđa* or *rahasyam* for the *raza'* – *mysterion* of Jesus Christ. Mar Ivanios' use of the term *marmmam* for Jesus Christ eminently corresponds to the *Pðûta* Pauline *raza'* – *mysterion* in Eph 3,3-5. And *marmmam* is inclusive of the *raza'* – *mysterion* communicated by *marmmamâya ðarîram*, *qûdâđa* and *rahasyam*.

In the “12th sermon” of Salga’s collection of Mar Ivanios’ exhortations to the Bethany nuns, from which I have quoted a little above, he said, “the central truth of Christianity is not a principle but a person – Jesus Christ, ... and this is the *marmmam* of Christianity.” It is the *marmmam* of Christ. Subsequently in the same sermon he clarifies in Pauline terms this *marmmam* (*raza'* – *mysterion*) of Christ: “that is the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus ...”(Eph 3,4). “That

Christ has become the way of salvation for the whole humanity is the *marmmam* of Christianity.” In Pauline terms he exposes its story. It has been hidden for the ages and generations but has been revealed to Paul (Col 1,26;Eph 3,3). And that *marmmam* is that in Christ mankind has the blessed life. Then he passes on from the risen Jesus Christ to the Church, and also to her mysteries, as Paul does in Eph 2,1-3,12 .

On some other occasions he explains the said *marmmam* of Christ in different ways. The question is how Jesus Christ is the way of salvation for the whole humanity. He did it quite systematically drawing the context and consequence of Jesus Christ’s incarnation. He describes ‘salvation’ of mankind’ in terms of ‘union with God.’ Let me summarize as follows his communication of his understanding of the mystery of Jesus Christ: God created the whole creation through the in a state of union with Him. Man is the summit and representative of the whole creation. Adamite sin disrupted the relation between God and the creation. Thence the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now to get reunited with God. Reunion had to be realized through mankind, the summit and representative of the whole creation. But mankind that is only a creature could not by its own power re-establish the union with God, and that particularly on account of its sinfulness. Therefore God who created everything had to take the initiative. The Word, who was with God, was Son of God, and was God and through whom everything was created, became man and dwelt among us. This is the Son of God’s incarnation: Jesus Christ. In him there is perfect union of divinity and humanity. He is perfect God and perfect man. His humanity is sinless. He is the Second Adam without sin. God united Himself with mankind and mankind with God through His Son . God has condescended to give us in Jesus Christ the possibility and the way for union with Him. The humanity of the Second Adam is the way God has given us to unite in divinity. Christ’s humanity is the way to his divinity. Christ’s divinity touched us, saved us, through his humanity, through his passion, death and resurrection. Jesus Christ having body (visibility) and soul (invisibility) is the way of our union with God (salvation). We must unite bodily

(visibly) and spiritually with soul (invisibly) with Jesus Christ. After His resurrection He touches us through His body, the Church. We get united to Him through the Church. In the Church He touches us and we touch Him through the mysteries of the Church, and through Him we get united with God. Thus both in His and our earthly life and in His and our life of resurrection, Jesus Christ is the way of our salvation.

In the exhortations 10 and 13 of Salga’s collection, Mar Ivanios illustrates the same motif of union with God through Jesus Christ in terms of ‘our holiness:’²⁰

“Christ is the way of salvation for mankind. To become Christ’s members, to live, and to become perfect as Christ’s members is described as holiness. Christ is the source of all our holiness. This is the way of salvation. This plan of salvation is designated as the mystery of Christ. How does Christ provide us holiness? There are three ways that the Church teaches. This is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God (Eph 3,9). 1) Christ is our perfect, the only model of holiness. Christ’s holiness is the exemplary cause of our holiness. That is to say, those who desire holiness must learn from and imitate Christ. 2) It is as our Saviour who has made the reparation for our sins and has wrought us redemption that Christ is the cause of our holiness. Christ is the meritorious cause of our holiness. 3) It is Christ who remains in us as the power of God’s holiness and acts in us as the source of life and who works in us in the way that holiness is effective in our soul. That is to say, Christ is the efficient cause of our holiness.”

“Christ is the life in our life. Christ is the foundation of all holiness. Christ is the essence of holiness. In Christ we become children of God. We are adopted. As children of God we have supernatural life. The principle – the inner life-power is grace. The fullness of that grace is in Christ. A) Christ is the model of any act we do on account of grace. B) Reparation for our sin was made by Christ’s life, passion and death. Thereby Christ has earned grace in him. C) We get this grace because we touch him. When the woman with the flow of blood touched the fringe of the Lord’s clothes power went

forth from him and healed her. Likewise through the holy mysteries, Christ's grace enters all those who touch Christ with faith. It is in this way that we are filled with holiness..."

This illustration of the three-dimensional provision of Christ's holiness to us is certainly typically western. In the 10th Sermon (on "The Source of Holiness") he is reported to have explained thus:

"Jesus Christ is the source of our holiness. We have holiness according to the measure of God's life in us. Jesus Christ is holiness in himself. We are to become holy by receiving holiness from Jesus Christ. In our night prayers we praise Jesus, "You only are holy." It is true. Among those born of woman only in Jesus Christ is God's life to the full. Only in Jesus Christ is God's holiness to the full. ...Our justice is in Christ. Our sanctification is in Christ. Our redemption is in Christ (1Cor 1,30). All our salvation is in Christ. Our forgiveness of sins in Christ... So Christ alone is the way of our salvation. We must be sharers of Christ's holiness. The door of eternal life is open to us in Christ. What is God's plan to save us? God the Father has appointed Christ as the head of a body..."

In continuation of the 13th Sermon Salga has reported five more Sermons (14th –18th Sermons) of Mar Ivanios on 'Christ our Model' They are further illustrations of how Christ our model provides us his holiness. This is how he proceeds in the 14th :

"God desires our holiness. Only by participating in God's holiness can we have holiness. We must become God's supernaturally adopted children and must live as the real children of the heavenly Father. `Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Eph 5,1). "You be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5,48). How to become perfect as the heavenly Father? He lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen, or can see (1Tim 6,16). No one has ever seen God (1 Jn 4,12). How can we become as a person whom we cannot see close and we cannot approach? Paul gives us the answer to this question. God has revealed Himself to us in Christ (2 Cor 4,6). Christ Jesus is the image (visible form) of the

invisible God (Col 1,15). “Christ Jesus is the reflection of God’s glory and the very stamp of the principle” (Heb 1,3). That is to say, Christ Jesus is the model that reveals externally the inner nature and holiness. Christ the image of the invisible God is perfectly like his Father. The one who desires to see the Father needs see only the Son. “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” Our Lord answered to Philip as he asked to show the Father (Jn 14,7-9). “No one except the Father knows the Son” (Mt 11,27). Therefore no one can know the Father. But anybody can know the Father if the Son reveals the Father. There is no way of knowing the Father except through the Son (Mt 11,27). “No one has ever seen God. The Only Begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father has revealed Him” (Jn 1,18)...

In the 14th Sermon he is purely biblical. (He follows the *Pḏīta* version). In this sermon he connects our holiness immediately with our adopted sonship. He does the same a little more elaborately in an earlier Sermon(9) also titled “*Rakshâmârgam*” (the way of salvation):

“Jesus the Messiah is the way of salvation for all people. “I am the way, truth and life.” God has appointed Jesus Christ the Second Adam so that through him God’s life is spread in all people. Through Christ God’s life overflows to people. Jesus Christ is by nature God’s Son. Because by grace we humans are grafted to Jesus Christ through him God’s life spreads into us. Christ is God’s Son by nature. As for us, we are God’s children by grace (Rom 8,29). Jesus Christ is the first born among many children. God preordained that all men (humans) be his brethren. What is the plan of salvation? We become God’s children through Jesus Christ (Gal 4,5). We can get sonship. This is the plan of salvation. This is a central principle of Christianity. All of us can get God’s life and grace through Jesus Christ. God’s life abides in all its fullness (Col 2,10). We who have received sonship are his members. In him we have everything. From his fullness we have received grace upon grace (Jn 1,16). Already before the foundation of the world God thought of us. Loved us. Chose us. While Christ is God’s Son by nature He preordained to make us His children (Rom 8,29). We are children adopted by God (Eph 1,5). God has

adopted us as the members of His household .Through Christ God has freely given us by grace the right of adoption. Because we are adopted we have received God’s life...”

In continuation of the 14th Sermon in the 15th he elaborates the way of our holiness by imitating Christ. The speaker illustrates that we can imitate the invisible spiritual Father by imitating Christ. We can imitate him because he is visible. He is God become man. He is visible under earthly human form. In the question of our holiness we can imitate Christ, because a) he is the perfect model for us; and b) he is imitable. “Jesus is the model of perfect holiness. He helps us to imitate him and makes imitation possible. Christ’s incarnate life showed us the way man must live God’s life. Therefore we should look at Jesus Christ with open eyes. We must look with faith. We must look with hope. We must look with love. Then we can see Christ as He is.” Then the speaker proceeds to illustrate his point with examples from Jesus Christ’s public ministry. Towards the end of this sermon he shifts to Johannine language, especially from 1John:

“Through all the things narrated above Christ has revealed to us God the Father – the inner life, nature and qualities of God. We can know Him proportionate to we love Christ. We shall know the Father proportionate to we know Christ (Jn 14,21). It is in Christ that God has been revealed as He is. God’s life has been revealed in Christ. To know God’s inner life it is enough that we see Christ’s inner life. Apostle John says: “(God’s) life was manifested to us. We saw it. We witnessed it. And we proclaim to you the eternal life that was with God and was revealed to us” (1Jn 1,2). “We heard, saw with our own very eyes, looked, and touched with our very hands Christ the Word of life, the one from the beginning” (1Jn 1,1). God appeared to us in Christ. We have communion with God the Father and with Jesus Christ His Son (1Jn 1,3). We desire that you also have this communion. So we preach the gospel to you (Jn 1,3)”.

In 16th-18th Sermons Mar Ivanios illustrates in typical western terminology how God the Word become man is model to us by his person and by his works. However amidst it he inserts the biblical theme of our adopted sonship, already elaborated in his 9th Sermon for depicting Christ our perfect and imitable model as our elder brother. “God the Word who became man is Son of God. By the grace we receive through him, we become children of God. He means that we receive the holiness of the Son of God whereby we also become children of God” (16th Sermon). “Christ is truly Son of man. He is perfectly man. So with bodily eyes people could see him. Human hands touched him (1Jn 1,1). He was Son of man while he was Son of God. By seeing and touching him also at his post-resurrection status, we, while being children of men, could be children of God. We have likeness with Christ. The sanctifying grace in us is the fundamental sign of our likeness with Christ. By the sanctifying grace we are Christ’s brethren and co-heirs with him” (17th sermon). Because he was perfect man he acted like perfect man. Thereby he is our accessible model of perfect holiness” (18th sermon).

In short, the *marmmam* (*raza’* – mystery – sacrament) of Jesus Christ is that he is *the way of salvation* for the whole mankind and thereby for the whole universe. Jesus Christ’s theandric existence is the perfect realization of the union of God and man. Through him God reached mankind and mankind reached God. His visibility (humanity) is the way for mankind towards his invisibility (divinity). Jesus Christ’s *marmmam* is that his incarnate body in its natural and glorified statuses is the way of salvation for the whole mankind and thereby for the whole universe. In his post-resurrection status his visibility and invisibility is continued through the Church, Christ’s body, whose invisible head is Christ. In the Church union with him, and through him with God, is realized through her mysteries. Mar Ivanios explains the *marmmam* (*raza’* – mystery – sacrament) of Jesus Christ also in terms of ‘holiness.’ God is holiness. Jesus Christ is the source of holiness for us. Through Jesus we are given holiness. Salvation through Jesus Christ means also gift of Jesus’ sonship to us. Through Jesus Christ, God adopts us as his children. We are made

co-heirs of the household of God with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ as our elder brother and perfect man is our imitable perfect model, by imitating whom we can certainly attain the salvation God has made available to us. God speaks to us through the Church.

Church the Mystery of Christ

The essence of his thought on the Church as the mystery of Christ is this: in the post-resurrection period, the Church as the body of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ is the way for union with him, who is the sole way of union with God.

Church the ‘Mysterious Body’ (*Marmmarûpamâya šarîram*)

Mar Ivanios describes the Church as Christ’s ‘mysterious body’ (*marmmarûpamâya đarîram*). He does not use the words *qûdâđa* or *rahasyam* in his description of the ‘body,’ the Church. He employs the adjective *marmmarûpamâya* (= mysterious) to qualify the ‘body’ the Church. Thereby he conveys that the Church is the mystery (**the** *qûdâđa* or *rahasyam* = the sacrament or mystery) of Christ. In the Church people can have saving contact with Jesus Christ. Thus the central point of the mystery (sacramentality) of the Church is her role in the mystery of salvation fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Mar Ivanios teaches: “The Church is the continuation of the incarnation...” Our Lord established his Church here on earth in order to continue his work of glorifying God and receiving and saving all people. It implies primarily the union of Jesus Christ and the Church. It implies also that he continues glorifying God and saving all people through the Church. The Church herself functions as the way for the continuation of the salvation fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Christian believers from the beginning perceived the “great mystery” of the union of Christ and the Church (Eph.5,31-32). The Church is perceived and presented as the proclamation and the presence of the salvation fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And the union of the whole mankind (“Gentiles made co-heirs with Jews”), the eternal plan of God, fulfilled in the mystery of Christ is realized in the Church. The ‘economy of our Saviour Jesus Christ’ (*mdabronuto’ d’poruko’ dilan yešu’ mšihô’*) takes effect in the Church

through her ministry, more especially that of the word and her mysteries. “The holy Church has arranged the *marmmam* of the incarnated life of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Christian liturgical year for the spiritual growth of the children, namely the members, of the Church. The Church is the body of the risen Lord Jesus Christ that gives people the life of Christ’s resurrection. As a follower of the Syriac tradition, Mar Ivanios is very much fond of presenting the Church as Jesus Christ’s body and bride. The Christian tradition from its very beginning describes and illustrates in many images the mystery of the unity of Christ and the Church and of her salvific ministry. Thus the Church is Christ’s bride (Eph.5,25-29), Christ’s flock (Mk13,27; Jn 10), Christ’s body 1 Cor. 12), God’s temple, God’s field, God’s house (1 Cor.3,16-17) *et cetera*. The Syriac tradition carried forward these and many other biblical images, with a certain preference to the ‘body’ and ‘bride’ images, to illustrate the Church and her salvific role. The multitude of such images witnesses the Syriac Church’s consciousness that the mystery of the Church is at the same time revealed, but inexhaustible by descriptions and illustrations. For the Syriac Christianity the Church is a mystery that is lived and celebrated. In her liturgical celebrations the Church celebrates herself. Simultaneously she witnesses, participates in and witnesses to the saving events commemorated. By this complexity of the paradoxes of the Church’s reality, in her liturgical celebrations she remains a lived experience for her children.

Being faithful to the Syriac tradition, Mar Ivanios describes the Church as Christ’s ‘mysterious body’ (*marmmarûpamâya ðarîram*). By way of an aside, it may be noted that *marmmarûpamâya ðarîram* does not mean ‘mystical body,’ a Western formulation with juridical implications, though elsewhere Mar Ivanios uses ‘mystical body’ for the Church. But by using only *marmmarûpamâya* for the Church he indicates that the Church is not one of the seven mysteries / *qûdâðakal* or *rahasyangal*. It implies also that the celebration of the economy of salvation performed in the concrete context of the seven liturgical celebrations is mysteries but not exactly as the Church is the mystery of Christ. The Church, as the body of Christ the head,

and as his bride, is the mystery of Christ in a unique way with the closest identification. The seven mysteries are “of the Church,” Christ’s *marmmarûpamâya ðarîram*, specifies Mar Ivanios.

Regarding the relation of a sort of identification between Jesus Christ and the Church Mar Ivanios is reported to have instructed the Bethany nuns as follows:

“Jesus Christ is God become man. He has the fullness of divinity and the fullness of humanity. But his humanity does not have *qnoma* (person). His divinity and humanity are united in God the Son, his *qnoma*. In the same way the Church, his *marmmarûpamâya ðarîram* (mysterious body) does not have *qnoma*. Jesus Christ is the *qnoma* of the Church. The parable of the leaven well illustrates the way Christ Jesus is spread in the whole Church. Just as the leaven spreads all through the dough. Jesus Christ lives in the whole Church and makes her his body.”²¹

Mar Ivanios’ distinction of the four statuses of Jesus Christ’s body sheds further light on the specificity of the ‘identification’ between him and the Church. There are four statuses of his body: 1) the incarnated natural body; 2) the glorified body; 3) the same body in the Eucharist, namely the sacramental body that we receive in the Eucharist (*qûdâðaparamâya rûpathil varunna ðarîram*); and 4) the mysterious body (*marmmarupamaya shariram*), which is the receptacle of the third status of Jesus Christ’s body.²²

In the post-resurrection period Christ abides in us with his glorified body, which now lives and has grown as the Church in the world. The Church is the mystery (the way and reality) of Christ. Mystery in Christian tradition contains visible and invisible realities. The Christian Church is the visibility of the invisible Christ. As the Malankara Church sings in the First Hour of her Sunday vigil of the liturgical season of resurrection,

“ The king of the heaven and the earth
Built the Church

And made it his seat
He entered in and abides in it.
Whosoever would speak to him
Let him enter in the Church .”

This hymn celebrates the mystery that the Church is Christ’s mystery. So now it is through the Christian Church that we are united with him. Acceptance of the mystery (sacramentality) of Jesus Christ involves the necessity of accepting the Church the way and reality (mystery, sacrament) of Christ-man unity. Therefore one who lives as a true Christian, a true devotee of Christ, is the one who grows in him tasting him more than ever before and abiding in the God-given Church of Christ. The Church is God’s tongue. God speaks to us through the Church. During Jesus’ earthly ministry God asked people to listen to Jesus (Mk 9,7). And after Jesus’ resurrection the Church, with whom the risen Jesus the Lord is, is to be listened to (Mt 28,18-20; 18,17-20). The Church as the fulfillment of Israel, and therefore as the true Israel, is the way of the mystery of Christ for the non-Jews too. Thus the true Israel character of the Church also speaks out her the mystery of Christ.

Mysteries of the Church – Way for Unity with Christ

Mar Ivanios teaches that the mysteries are the ways that Christ himself, the *way* of God-man communion, has by his paschal mystery instituted for mankind in order to get united with him in the Church, his *bride / his mysterious body*. Mysteries bring union with Jesus Christ in the Church. This explanation is different from the then dominant Western (Tridentine) teaching that ‘the sacraments are the visible signs that give us invisible grace.’ The phrase ‘invisible grace’ here is vague. Also the modern Western description of the sacraments as ‘encounter with Christ’ does not apparently convey the aspect of union with Christ in the Church. It is true that the explanation of the mysteries as the ways of union with Christ in the Church does not essentially differ from the Western tradition in the basic understanding of the underlying meaning and theological content of the various mysteries. Nor is ‘grace’ (*thaibûta*) unfamiliar to the Syriac tradition and Mar Ivanios.

Already before his full communion with the Catholic Church he taught that we have received *grace* from God. But Mar Ivanios, faithful to the West Syriac tradition, is very particular about the aspect of personal relation with Christ that is given to the recipient through the mysteries in the Church. “Christ lives in us through the Sacraments, through the Eucharist, Baptism, the sacrament of Penance...” And “through the sacraments we live in the Christ ascended into the heaven.” He found the relation of the recipient of the mysteries with the Church and the growth of the Church also very important. Insistence on the union with Jesus Christ is significant because in this period of fulfillment of God’s salvific plan Jesus Christ is the perfect union of God and man on earth, and it is through him that God’s saving grace is given in full to man (Jn 1,14) and man gets united with God. ‘Grace’ given in the mysteries is not an indefinite ‘something.’ It is the grace of getting united with the person of Jesus Christ. In fact Jesus Christ himself is the grace. This explanation is very important from the anthropological-Christology of the West Syriac tradition. The fathers of this tradition insist that the fallen nature of human beings has caused Christ to incarnate and to save the humanity.

Origin of the Mysteries of the Church from Christ’s Heart (=Side)

“This river that has flown from Christ’s holy heart – the river that carries and flows – must flow into your soul. Therefore you must construct channels into your soul. These channels are the holy qudashas (sacraments).” This is the second citation in the initial paragraph of the present work from Mar Ivanios about the mysteries of the Church. The first sentence passionately describes the origin of the mysteries from Christ’s pierced side — a motif very dear to the Syriac sacramental theology. Elsewhere he repeats the same: *“Remember that the power of the holy qûdâḏakal (= sacraments) of the Church is on account of the source from which they originate. They all are effective because they originate from the Lord’s side.”*²³ Mar Ivanios is a ‘heart specialist.’ Very often in his writings and speeches he brings in this image. When he speaks of the heart of

Christ he means his pierced side. The second sentence of the citation insists on the co-operation from the part of man to receive the mysteries of the Church.

The Mysteries of the Church are Not Miracles

The mysteries are signs, not miracles, insists Mar Ivanios: “When (Jesus) made the bread the holy body and wine the holy blood, he was not doing a miracle. The bread did not get the taste or other qualities of flesh. Nor did the wine get the taste and other qualities of blood. He made by grace the holy body and the holy blood. Here the Lord did not work a miracle. He worked a *qûdâḏa* (sacrament). And he asked to perform it ... in the Church (Lk 22:19).” This is a very significant position having great relevance for the present when a big number of ‘pious souls’ are made to become fond of seeing and propagating the appearance of ‘bleeding flesh’ of the mystery of the Eucharist!

Mysteries and Tradition

The historical precedence of the Church and her mysteries over the New Testament is another important emphasis of Mar Ivanios’ sacramental theology. The mysteries of the Church belong to her earliest Tradition. Even before the New Testament books were written, the Church was living the mysteries. Thus he pays much attention to the relation between the Church’s lived and living Tradition and her mysteries.

Mysteries and Unity of the Churches

Finally, I must conclude this article with a few words on his perception of the mysteries of the Church as the way for the re-union of the Churches. He holds, as indicated earlier in this article, the reunion with God through Christ by the mysteries of the Church must necessarily lead to the full unity of the Churches that celebrate them. Mar Ivanios’ perception of the mysteries of the Church, especially the Eucharist, is a challenge to live the organic unity of the one body

of Christ. About baptism he is reported to have instructed thus: “Baptism is not of any particular Church.” It involves the fundamental unity of all those who receive Christian baptism, and the call for the manifestation of the unity of the Church of Christ into which men and women are received by the sacrament of baptism. So he esteems the entry into the Catholic Church as the fulfillment of all graces received up to then.